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# STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

## Letter dated 29 October 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka, President of the Republic of Belarus (annex I), and a memorandum issued by the Government of Belarus concerning further coordinated activities of the international community on Chernobyl and the possible implementation under United Nations auspices of the proposals by Belarus regarding international cooperation in relation to Chernobyl (annex II).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 21.

(Signed) Alyaksandr SYCHOU
Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Belarus
to the United Nations

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ANNEX I

[Original: Russian]

Letter dated 24 October 1996 from the President of the Republic of Belarus addressed to the Secretary-General

The world has never before experienced an environmental catastrophe as vast as the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. For over 10 years, Belarus has been experiencing the consequences of a national ecological disaster. As you are aware, 70 per cent of the fallout from Chernobyl fell in Belarus, and the average radiation burden on the population is the highest in the world. The incidence of thyroid cancer has increased several hundredfold, and the birth rate has fallen by 40 per cent. The number of victims is now in the thousands. People continue to suffer from the consequences of the disaster. The Government of Belarus has been compelled to allocate up to one quarter of the national revenue to resolving the post-Chernobyl problems.

The Government of Belarus attaches vital importance to United Nations activities to mobilize international assistance and promote the special post-Chernobyl interests of Belarus, the most affected State with the least financial resources. We are grateful for the efforts that have been made and we thank you and the entire staff of the United Nations and its specialized agencies for their contribution to the noble cause of assisting the victims of Chernobyl.

We are also pleased that the General Assembly at its fiftieth session adopted a resolution that placed the Chernobyl problem on the agenda of the Assembly's fifty-second session in 1997. We are convinced that the Assembly should continue to consider this question in subsequent years.

Bearing in mind the special nature of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster for Belarus, I should like to draw your attention to the principal Belarusian strategies for developing long-term international cooperation in the second post-Chernobyl decade.

On the whole, the Government of Belarus commends the efforts of the organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. At the same time, it is somewhat disappointed at the meagre response of individual intergovernmental organizations to the Secretary-General's appeal to provide assistance to projects to minimize the tragic consequences of the disaster.

We believe that such a response is an indication of a lack of sufficient coordination and complementarity in the efforts of the United Nations Secretariat and organizations and agencies of the United Nations system. Over the past five years, there have been five United Nations Coordinators for International Cooperation on Chernobyl. The Chernobyl secretariat was completely reorganized four times. In our opinion, such instability in staffing cannot be explained only by efforts to reform the United Nations Secretariat.

We are deeply convinced that the main problem continues to be that of financing the list of priority Chernobyl programmes and projects reviewed by the United Nations in 1995. We are well aware of the Organization's critical financial situation and we are not counting on further resources from its budget. In this regard, I should like to remind you that, in November 1995, the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl entrusted the Department of Humanitarian Affairs with the task of developing a strategy for appealing to intergovernmental financial institutions and donor countries to finance Chernobyl-related projects.

As you know, the economy of Belarus is gradually recovering from the damage caused by the Chernobyl disaster, and this work continues to be a priority in the Government's socio-economic and scientific and technological programmes. However, Belarus is not in a position to solve the whole range of problems on its own. Its need for resources to overcome the consequences of the disaster is many times greater than its economic and technological capacities. Our country is in dire need of international financial and technical assistance to support the long-term medical programmes being carried out with the participation of the World Health Organization (WHO), which will have the greatest effect for the rehabilitation and sustainable development of the affected districts.

Belarus would like to see more results in the work of the mechanism for coordinating United Nations Chernobyl-related activities. We propose that, at its scheduled November 1996 meeting, the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl consider a strategy for international cooperation in the second post-Chernobyl decade and approve a programme of action by the United Nations and intergovernmental institutions to mobilize resources for the implementation of international Chernobyl projects. The phases and modalities for the purpose of advancing medical and environmental projects and programmes should be specified with a view to ensuring the sustainable economic and social development of Belarus, a country with an economy in transition, which finds itself in critical circumstances as a result of the Chernobyl disaster.

I should like to mention the following priority areas for international post-Chernobyl cooperation with Belarus:

- Concentration of the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations and other international and regional organizations on providing medical and other free assistance to the most affected groups of the population: children, 'liquidators' and inhabitants of evacuated districts;

- Consolidation in the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations of a long-term policy approach to solving post-Chernobyl problems;

- Promotion of bilateral cooperation on Chernobyl between Belarus and donor countries as an additional basis for international research and practical projects;

- Dissemination of balanced and objective information both among the affected population and throughout the world.

The Government of Belarus believes that the implementation of the aforementioned proposals will contribute to an appropriate division of labour among the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system and the Organization's Secretariat.

I should like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in the opening and work of the International (regional) Conference on the Sustainable Development of the Economies in Transition, which will be held in Minsk from 23 to 25 April 1997.

(Signed) Alyaksandr LUKASHENKA

ANNEX II

[Original: Russian]

Memorandum on the possible implementation under United Nations auspices of the proposals by Belarus regarding international cooperation in relation to Chernobyl

The Government of Belarus has more than once expressed its deep concern at the continuing impact of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster on the life and health of people.

The world has never before experienced such a vast environmental catastrophe. The number of victims is now in the thousands, and people continue to suffer. The Government of Belarus has been compelled to allocate up to one quarter of the national revenue to resolving the post-Chernobyl problems. The average radiation burden on the population is the highest in the world. The incidence of thyroid cancer has increased several hundredfold, and the birth rate has fallen by 40 per cent.

The economy of Belarus is gradually recovering from the damage caused by Chernobyl, and this work continues to be a priority in the Government's socio-economic and scientific and technological programmes. However, Belarus is not in a position to solve the whole range of problems on its own. Its need for resources to overcome the consequences of the disaster is many times greater than its economic and technological capacity.

The problem of Chernobyl continues to be a humanitarian tragedy on an international scale, and it can be solved only with the help of purposive and consistent international action.

The Government of Belarus attaches vital importance to United Nations activities to mobilize international assistance and promote the special post-Chernobyl interests of Belarus, the most affected State with the least financial resources. Belarus is grateful for the efforts that have been made, and thanks the United Nations and its specialized agencies for their contribution to the noble cause of assisting the victims of Chernobyl.

The General Assembly, the United Nations Secretariat, the intergovernmental and inter-agency mechanisms for the coordination of international cooperation, and also the activities of the funds, programmes, organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, have made and are continuing to make an important contribution to the initiation of broad and comprehensive study in order to mitigate and minimize the consequences of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power station, to the prevention of further nuclear accidents and to enhancing the readiness of the international community to react to accidents with radiological consequences.

The Government of Belarus is deeply convinced that the main problem continues to be that of financing the list of priority Chernobyl programmes and projects reviewed by the United Nations in 1995. The resources of the United

Nations Trust Fund for Chernobyl have been exhausted. Without additional assistance from the international community, the efforts of the United Nations in this field would have to be halted precisely at a time when the accuracy of the apprehensions expressed earlier about the long-time nature of the disaster's ruinous consequences has started to be confirmed.

Belarus is well aware of the critical financial situation of the United Nations, and is not counting on further resources from its budget. In this regard, the Government of Belarus would like to refer to the intention previously expressed by the United Nations Secretariat of reviewing and approving at a forthcoming meeting of the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl the phases and modalities of action by the United Nations to encourage donors to extend generous and tangible assistance for the purpose of advancing medical and environmental projects and programmes capable of reviving the sustainable development of the three countries that suffered most as a result of the Chernobyl disaster.

In view of the scale of the problems and the insufficient response from international donors, there is a need for additional efforts to draw the attention of the world community to the long-term nature of the consequences of Chernobyl. Belarus considers it necessary to review at the next meeting of the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl a strategy for international cooperation in the second post-Chernobyl decade, and to approve a programme of action by the United Nations and intergovernmental institutions to mobilize resources for the implementation of international Chernobyl projects.

Belarus wishes to identify the following as priority areas for post-Chernobyl international cooperation:

- Concentration of the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations and other international and regional organizations on providing medical and other free assistance to the most effected groups of the population - children, liquidators, and the inhabitants of the evacuated districts;

- Consolidation in the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations of a long-term policy approach to solving post-Chernobyl problems;

- Promotion of bilateral cooperation on Chernobyl between Belarus and donor countries as an additional basis for international research and practical projects;

- Dissemination of balanced and objective information both among the affected population and throughout the world.

Belarus is unfortunately compelled to note that for various reasons of an economic and organizational nature, over the course of the 10 years since the Chernobyl disaster the world has not yet been able to create an effective system for studying all of its consequences. In this connection, in April 1996 in the course of the Vienna International Conference "One Year After Chernobyl:

Summing Up the Consequences of the Accident", Belarus put forward the idea of establishing an "international inter-State centre on the problems of Chernobyl".

Belarus welcomes the contribution of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to the establishment on the basis of the Chernobyl nuclear power station of an international scientific and technical research centre under IAEA auspices in Ukraine and an international centre for reducing the medical consequences of Chernobyl under WHO auspices in Obninsk (Russian Federation), attaches great importance to their experience and regards the activities of the centres as a significant step towards expanding the capabilities of the international community for studying, mitigating and minimizing the consequences of such accidents.

In putting forward the proposal for the establishment and operation of the centre, Belarus takes into account the existence of interest among foreign countries and international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, especially international scientific associations and other professional non-governmental organizations, and also recognizes the need to prevent duplication of activity among the existing long-term international scientific programmes and international centres.

The Polessk State Radiation and Environmental Reserve, located in Belarus on territory directly adjacent to the Chernobyl nuclear power station, possesses appropriate infrastructure, including highly qualified scientists and experts, and has unique conditions and research subjects, thus making it possible to develop practical approaches and establish effective methods of overcoming the consequences of nuclear disasters and ensuring environmental rehabilitation of territories polluted by radionuclides.

The scientific topics of the Reserve's activities include:

Conduct of radio-environmental monitoring of the territories directly adjacent to the Chernobyl nuclear power station;

Determination of the prospects for forestry activities on soils polluted by radionuclides;

Study of the migration of radionuclides in forest and aquatic ecosystems;

Forecasting the dynamics of radioactive pollution of agricultural land.

An important point relating to the conduct of reliable medical investigations is the availability in Belarus of:

Pre-Chernobyl statistics on thyroid diseases;

A complete national register of persons who participated in the post-accident and rehabilitation activities in the territory adjacent to the Chernobyl nuclear power station;

A national post-Chernobyl programme for the study and prevention of genetic consequences.

The cost of establishing and operating the centre could be borne in part by the countries that suffered most from Chernobyl. Part of these expenditures could be covered out of the accumulated and unutilized portion of their contributions in national currency to IAEA, WHO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and also, perhaps, from voluntary contributions by interested non-governmental donors.

The expenditures to purchase the necessary equipment could be reimbursed by interested regional and subregional cooperation institutes out of the resources available to them.

The Government of Belarus intends to create highly favourable conditions for the conduct of multilateral research projects at the "inter-State scientific centre on the problems of Chernobyl", and hopes to learn the views of foreign countries and international organizations regarding the direct areas for joint scientific study, the organization and financing of activities and the participation of foreign scientists and experts in the implementation of the projects.

Belarus welcomes the multilateral initiatives of the leading industrially developed countries aimed at ensuring the safety of obsolete nuclear reactors, particularly those of the Chernobyl type. At the same time, the Government of Belarus is concerned that the discussion under way in the world regarding the closing down of the Chernobyl reactor obscures the issue of eliminating the medical and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, the brunt of which is borne by our country.

Belarus is convinced that international efforts to strengthen the nuclear safety regime should be synchronized with additional preventive measures, so as to exclude the possibility of further Chernobyls in the future. This would be fully in line with the mandate given by General Assembly resolution 50/134 of 20 December 1995, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

Belarus considers it desirable that along with investments in improving nuclear reactor safety, provision should be made for capital investments aimed at eliminating the consequences of incidents at nuclear power stations and conducting rehabilitation programmes.

In view of what has been stated above, Belarus is in favour of the establishment of an "international fund for elimination of the consequences of radiological accidents", whose functions would include accumulating part of the profits of international nuclear engineering and nuclear power corporations and redistributing these resources for the above-mentioned purposes.

In this connection, Belarus attaches great importance to the experience of such authoritative intergovernmental institutions as the Global Environment Facility and UNEP in the financing of international environmental programmes and projects.

At the same time, the Government of Belarus is compelled to note that the work of these institutions takes practically no account of the vital interests of States which have suffered as a result of nuclear and other technological disasters and accidents and accordingly need to rehabilitate their environment and restore their sustainable development.

The natural potential partners and possible co-founders of the fund could be, in the first place, the countries and corporations of the "international nuclear community", and also IAEA and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM).

The Government of Belarus considers that the above proposals are capable of ensuring an appropriate division of labour between the institutions of the United Nations system and the Secretariat of the United Nations, paying due attention to the comparative advantages of each of them.

Belarus takes a flexible position with regard to its proposals in relation to international cooperation on Chernobyl, with a view to reaching a consensus on their possible implementation under the auspices of the United Nations, and is also prepared to cooperate in considering other ideas about how best to organize international cooperation in the second post-Chernobyl decade.

Belarus is counting on political support for these proposals from the United Nations and its agencies, and also from the Governments of States Members of the United Nations.

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